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AUTHOR Siger, Leonard P.
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ABSTRACT

The Baltimore schools' mainstreaming program for deaf students are critiqued, and reasons for the programs successes and failures are recounted. Among success factors considered are administrative support, inservice teacher education programs, and special events including presentations of the Little Theatre of the Deaf. (CL)

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MAINSTREAMING THE DEAF IN A METROPOLITAN SETTING: A CRITIQUE

Leonard P. Siger, Ph.D.

Paper presented at the 48th Biennial Meeting of the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf, June 27, 1977, Los Angeles Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, California.

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Leonard P. Siger, Ph.D.
Department of Hearing Disabilities
Division for Exceptional Children
Baltimore City Public Schools
2300 North Calvert Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

Paper presented at the 48th Biennial Meeting of the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf, June 27, 1977, Los Angeles Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, California.

MAINSTREAMING THE DEAF IN A METROPOLITAN SETTING: A CRITIQUE

If we believe the famous hospital in Baltimore, there are "very, very few people who are totally deaf," in which case there would not be much use for this meeting. But we are used to that kind of stuff and nonsense from big city hospitals, and therefore it cannot affect the reason for being of the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf. Nevertheless, because certain perverse thinking by the hospital establishment continues to exert a dreadful influence on the education of some deaf children, I have thought it well, here in one of the largest of those big American cities, to open the closet door at the beginning, that we may take a look at the skeleton inside. The term "hearing impaired" and the supergeneralized philosophy operating behind it is yielding up the ghost with gradually decreasing reluctance, but the uniqueness of deaf children in their thousands is still being dissipated or denied

altogether in the larger mass of hard of hearing in their hundreds of thousands. The efforts of the celebrated inventor Alexander Bell and his ardent modern-day followers have not helped. And I am very sorry for it, because they could do so much if they could just be brought to act honestly. Good deeds are a mighty purifier of a soiled spirit.

Even the institutions of healing to which I have referred, so vigorous and at the same time serene in their denial of communication rights to the deaf, will sooner or later have to surrender, hopefully without condition, to the recent Federal regulations, Section 84.52(c):

> Emergency treatment of the hearing impaired. A recipient hospital that provides health services or benefits shall establish a procedure for effective communication with persons with impaired hearing for the purpose of providing emergency health care.

I think I know the direction of the language. Despite retention of the offending generalization - how can there be a law without a loophole - the sentence points to eventual liberation. Which means the deaf and their Sign Language may breach the sacred precincts of mighty medical practice. Now assuming that big hospital business pays any attention at all to the regulation,

one does not have to be a legal expert to visualize reactionary health experts fighting a rearguard action on deaf children after losing the battle to preserve their right to neglect deaf adults. First, for example, they may contend the audiological assessment of a deaf child is not emergency health care. Then when they lose that, we can suppose their agents will argue deaf children are not persons because they haven't had their speech lesson yet and learned to say ba-ba. Finally, if I estimate their ingenuity accurately, they will contend, in the full blossom of paradox, the children are not hearing impaired but deaf and therefore do not fall under the law. What some people who ought to know better will do to deprive another of Sign Language. As if the deprivation yielded some identifiable benefit yet to be shown after seventy-five years of sign-stifling non-research.

The bleak prospect for a deaf child in the great hospitals has had to be characterized, because their power affects the child's schooling negatively when they fail to check professional prejudice or class prejudice or race prejudice or handicap prejudice, and thus it is in their broad shadow that I deliver this report on a year of mainstreaming in Baltimore. The method is narrative and ethically based on a nonstatistical instrument for program analysis. By

this mode perhaps others will find a way to follow and report on their cities in due course. I don't for a moment believe Baltimore is unique either for its accomplishments or for its problems, but you may find unusual a report that covers program aspects good and bad. Accordingly, I shall discuss the background of the program, the circumstances of its installation, and its current status. Keep in mind that educational mainstreaming of deaf children with non-deaf, historically, is always doomed to failure unless it reproduces exactly and without diminution the communicative elements of successful, what shall we call it, "non-mainstreaming." I refer of course to traditional state residential school programs for educating deaf children to be responsible citizens.

I do not know what happened to deaf children in Baltimore before 1933. From that year until 1976 they were "sidestreamed" at a handsome school for crippled children, built and specially designed and equipped to provide physical therapy for childhood victims of polio. As the wave of that dreaded plague receded, victims of other diseases replaced the children for whom the school was put up. There were classes for the deaf from the start, and as the

years went by they increased until occupying half the school.

The program always included deaf and hard of hearing children, but the deaf increased in relative proportion during the latter years. With the waning of the Sign Language-deprived system, teachers of the deaf were admitted, and in 1970 total communication was introduced into all classes for the deaf, after a summer course for the faculty in manual communication and education of the deaf that had among its lecturers some of the most prominent names in the field today. In the summer of 1971 as a reinforcement more courses were added and again taught by outstanding authorities who were proponents of the deaf.

In the first year of total communication it was reported that a remarkable change had come over the deaf children, that they were learning for the first time since the school opened, 37 years before. In the decade of the Sixties it had been suggested that Sign Language be used, but the proposal was vetoed. The air was thick with the odor of mouth-talk and lip-read. For that reason the school was a thorn in the side of the deaf community, which had to endure the pain. It was a bad time to be a deaf child in. The sign for the school, which had an agreeable name, was a crooked V in front of the face. Also before 1970 applications by deaf persons to teach were routinely rejected with

the explanation that there were no deaf children in the city, and even if there were, no deaf could pass the physical.

Within three years of the advent of total communication, an excellent faculty assembled itself. But it ran aground at the time of launch in shallow administrative waters. The spirit flew from the program, its collective energy was sapped, and the teachers scattered to the four winds. They were replaced by others with like competency but with the program lacking minimal direction by an educator of the deaf, it stayed smack on the path of annual self-destruct.

Total communication had come to the school, but it did not arrive anywhere else, especially in the medical power centers. The giants of healing, those big metro hospitals, ruled the scene dictating alike to university, college, and school system. Where they did not openly vilify and condemn Sign Language, their overbrooding presence on the question was felt. They had to be obeyed. You would think Sign Language was a rare disease communicable to <u>them</u>, perish the thought. Once I can recall they were prevailed upon to look at it, whereupon it produced in them a shudder quickly followed by a disparaging harumph. The accomplishments of Sign Language earned no points outside the school. The newborn program cried for life, but direction was nil, and the

baby did not grow. Only the field force of total communication kept it alive, barely. Deaf children could sign, and their hands were no longer struck with hard objects. They were taught as persons who were deaf, with whatever means were available. The teachers worked either in isolation or in whatever spontaneous combinations they could conceive and get away with. It was a bottom without a top, a boat without a rudder, adrift in the shifting seas of urban school funding and politics but it floated, perilously. Teachers of the deaf repeatedly presented memoranda of information on how to change incidental and accidental achievements to an orderly educational program, but nothing happened. They were not accorded the reaction of an honest rebuff. They got a blank stare. Administratively, the children still were considered not deaf but only hard of hearing. To illustrate conditions at the time, I cite an article published in the American Annals of the Deaf in 1974 stating that the school for crippled children "has a special section for hearing-impaired children where the pure oral method is used." That's four years after total communication and two before mainstreaming. Thus, total communication stayed locked up tight in the school with no discernible effect outside or above the school. It boiled and it simmered, now the one and now the other, but it did

not percolate. It appeared to be definitively sealed off from the world of deaf education.

By early 1976 deinstitutionalized children with severe limitations were coming into the school system in sufficient number to require the full use of facilities at the school for crippled children. Opposition to moving centered around the defensive argument that the children were too infantile to survive in the hurlyburly of regular public schools, and it was feared that the services yet remaining at the school for crippled children would be lost forever.

Enter the theory of mainstreaming, up front, stage center, and as follows. The research proved that deaf children were as smart as any other children, and the law gives them the right to be educated in an environment less restricted than a school populated by children with severe to profound intellectual and orthopedic limitations. Correct. And the rest is legend. Whatever the motive and no matter what the style of implementation, the essential fact is that for the first time in 43 years the unaccustomed ingredient of thought entered an administrative decision concerning the deaf. It may have been imprecisely and incompletely shaped, it may have been the product of expediency as much as of

perception, and it may have been imperiously rendered without the gloss of pseudo-participation that is in vogue today, but it had thought in it and no one can detract from it as such. Moreover it really was an administrative decision and not a facsimile. It took a new superintendent to accomplish the first administrative lift in the modern history of education of the deaf in metropolitan Baltimore to chin the bar, so to speak.

Ten classes of deaf children were scheduled at three regular elementary schools. In the last month of the school year one of the schools received a mini-course on total communication. A similar course had been given three months before to another of the schools without relationship to mainstreaming but in conjunction with a Sign Language and Deaf Awareness teaching program established earlier. During the summer of 1976 the distinguished educator of the deaf Roy K. Holcomb, at the instance of the superintendent, conducted a three-day workshop for teachers and staff, which was a masterpiece of clarity on deafness and mainstreaming, spelling out in no uncertain terms the minimal standards for any activity under that name. In the fall two groups of teachers in the third school took the mini-course orientation, and Dr. Holcomb returned for an evening workshop with parents. Meanwhile, in the first school, where

half the classes for the deaf were located, there began a 30-hour inservice course in Sign Language taught to the entire faculty in small groups by teachers of the deaf.

And now it is one year later, and I report the change, which is in essence for the better. Opponents to moving the deaf discovered their fears were unjustified, indeed that other teachers were interested in deaf children too, with interest in direct proportion to the amount of deaf children visible. Deaf parent-liaison workers were hired and assigned to the schools, where they worked hard during the year with available parents and with teachers. More than 150 hearing children were instructed in Sign Language by them. The parent-liaisons included the first quiet deaf people ever hired by the school system for a non-custodial job, and they may be the only quiet deaf people working in an educational capacity in a day program in the United States. It is not easy for nonvocal deaf people to gain this kind of employment because of their own diffidence but mostly because of our field's general reliance on the simultaneous method aspect of total communication and, relatedly, our weak or nonexistent competencies in both American and idiosyncratic Sign Language. Like in the story of the graduate student who asked the landlady for a room

over the phone. He explained, I am a foreign student. The landlady asked, where from? He said, India. And she replied, I'm afraid that's a little too foreign. Quiet deaf people are almost always seen as "too" deaf. But they will prove to be increasingly invaluable as educational personnel in the years to come, not only for day programs but for all programs in their pre-school and perinatal phases. Remember that, in principle, the only viable prosthesis for a deaf infant is a deaf parent. We have a duty to hearing mothers and fathers of deaf children that we would be wise to start attending to.

In addition to the brilliant Holcomb workshops, program survival was aided materially by special events, most of which occurred early on in the year and all of which originated in the office of the superintendent. The Little Theatre of the Deaf was brought to the mainstreaming schools, and children from the state program were invited and attended. The National Theatre of the Deaf had been sponsored in connection with the Sign Language and Deaf Awareness teaching program for two remarkable performances during the year before mainstreaming. Telecommunication equipment was ordered for the schools, and teachers of the deaf participated in the development of written plans for its use. The children attended a gala party given by high school students of Sign

Language for credit and thus had a chance to talk and be with deaf friends some of whom they had not seen since the previous June. Near the end of the year ten children were selected to attend a four-star camp in Pennsylvania with total communication.

But special events are dessert, and educational programs like people need a balanced diet. We have strong needs in the areas of diagnostic and prescriptive teaching, achievement testing, curriculum, and social work. The program has pieces of these services, but the portions are too small for proper nourishment. For example, there is a cut-off time for parents of the deaf to learn Sign Language to save their children, and skilled teachers of the deaf no matter what the effect of their exertions in the classroom feel acute professional pain when that time comes, and goes. These needs, it is believed, can be fulfilled with relative ease by the appointment of an administrator with knowledge of deaf education. For metropolitan school governments, the introduction of a new office for deaf education will provide half the administrative interface required for effective communication with residential schools that have commenced bona fide efforts to become state-wide resource centers. Depending on the state, the role of leadership might be shared or, if

necessary, undertaken by the city. Automatic residentialization for the profoundly handicapped is out, for this generation at least. Individual assessment is in, and the barriers between day and residence programs will have to be lowered and eliminated if intelligent use is to be made of both.

If I may note parenthetically and develop a little more completely the point made about parents in the preceding discussion: Our whole profession needs to detyrranize its approach to the deaf child and the child's family. It is a fundamental aspect of childhood advocacy, not to take advantage of the deaf person's seeming non-responsiveness by withholding information or by misinforming, since either of these two wrong procedures may cause unrecoverable psychosocial injury to the child and recognizably damaging expense of spirit and pocket to the family. In contrast, take the case of parents of blind or crippled children. They make special plans and adjustments for daily living along with the child precisely as the child alone and of necessity will do as an adult. The poor - in the meaning of negligently deceived - parents of a deaf child, on the other hand, are cheerily commanded, first, to make no constructive plans regardless of what their common sense tells them and, second, never to forget to make a nice, natural mouth while talking. Hence,

no doubt, the spectacle of parents with marginal means for it scuttering desperately about the nation and, sometimes, the world seeking that which has become expanded in their minds to veritable deliverance but which should have been mere, ordinary, local help like for tuberculosis or chronic diabetes counseling and treatment. Parents of blind or crippled children can hardly be so fooled and fooled around with by vested health authorities and their equally deafness-denying derivative functionaries, because children of the aforementioned parents vocalize and will say at every point of possible wholesale deception, But can't you see that I am blind? That I am crippled? That's what keeps the health servants dutiful and clean. The simple but devastating tyranny over deaf children, wherever it may continue to exist, stems from the suppression of their manual speech. We return to the report.

If the pillars of mainstreaming are schoolwide total communication and in-depth parent involvement, then the keystone of it is interpreter-tutors. A few children were mainstreamed in the schools for two academic subjects with spontaneously chosen interpreter-tutors. Next year interpreter-tutors will be formally scheduled. If, therefore, you think that mainstreaming is a matter of deaf children learning in classes with hearing children in substantial quantity,

then you will have to admit that the Baltimore plan during its first year was a failure. If you are willing with me to stretch the concept to take in the opening of a way to possible mainstreaming, then you will have to agree we did it.

Despite deficiencies progress was made in such areas as (1) the use and care of hearing aids, (2) pupil behavior and sense of responsibility, (3) physical environment, (4) written English expression, (5) speech and language therapeutic services, (6) Sign Language facility of aides, and (7) instructional setting. The last area was described by teachers in chorus as, in a word, "freedom." Insofar as freedom is a precondition for meritorious human achievement, the final item is potentially the most important since from it benefits for deaf children can be derived most easily, including peripheral goods. The regular school personnel and children, according to their testimony, learned much about the deaf and through that experience more about themselves and their own work. Such learning is a principal aim of the Baltimore plan since it has a direct affirmative influence on the social prerequisite for vital economic mainstreaming after school completion.

The schools had first-rate principals attuned to academic standards. Each

principal was thoroughly experienced and geared by personal inclination and training to right principles of childhood development. What the teachers said at one school stands for all three. The principal was the greatest asset. And why was this so? Because the principal did not believe that the deaf children were hearing children who could not hear. Aside from any other useful attributes, that one catapulted the principal in the teachers' estimation up and over the fogbank of overemphasis on pathology and reliance on misplaced sentiment that has beclouded dayschool programs. Teachers also agreed the sorest defect of the program was the absence of immediate administrative responsibility in education of the deaf. The principal of a regular school in which deaf children are mainstreamed cannot assume it for reasons of time, energy, and circumstance, let alone specialized preparation and experience, nor should be expected to. It is admirable enough when the principal strikes a bold insight into the situation. There is, however, no substitute for active, structured support directly related to childhood deafness.

Analysis of other levels in the administrative hierarchy reinforces the same conclusion. The specific responsibility of a metropolitan superintendent of special education, whose first burden is one of sheer numerical weight,

cannot be deaf children, who are few by comparison. The major concern of a big-system communication disorders administrator is also not deafness but primarily learning disabilities, of which there are many. The main duty of a hearing impairment administrator is not deaf children but auxiliary services to hard of hearing children, who enjoy a deserved privilege. In the last example, deaf education could be part of the responsibility, but it is not, and rightly so, because its whole point of departure is a quite different training, discipline, and focus. Overlaps are present but irrelevant to the deaf child's privilege which has been traditionally recognized at the state school level and ignored in the cities. To be sure, the newer statutes increasingly are dissolving the vague and conglomerative term "hearing impaired" into the appropriate terms hard of hearing and deaf, which are more functional in helping us to know what we are doing. Section 121a.4 of last year's departmental rules on education for handicapped children tries to make the distinction sharp. Accuracy of definition is a virtue in education as well as in law or science. Only bias, whether of the common kinds or of the more insidious "professional" type, dislikes and distrusts it. Through the veil of baseless preconception shines the right of the handicapped. Deaf children deserve recognition for their

program, and their teachers require sensitive direction in the form of active, continuous, and knowledgable support. For these reasons a school system with a program in deaf education should incorporate an administrative officer to manage it.

The last cause in the chain of thought whose final effect is an educated and self-reliant deaf citizen, goes back to the beginning of childhood. Even if it was conclusively demonstrated that alternative schooling in the mainstream was impossible for deaf children and if the laws were amended to reflect that finding, there would still be a need to serve deaf children who are too young to be separated from their mothers by providing for them where they are. This category includes every deaf child, and it is irreducible. A program would be needed and if established, it would have to have an administrator who was ready with the energy, willing without reluctance, and able through skill and experience to tell parents the truth, to fit the family and child with a total communication apparatus, and to reasonably start the wonderful process of raising that deaf child in a manner consistent with the principle of "main-streaming" embodied in the equal protection and due process clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

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